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Brooks, Van Wyck

VERSES

BY

TWO

UNDERGRADUATES

1905



*Van Wyck Brooks,
Westport, Conn.*



Harvard College Library

FROM

Van Wyck Brooks

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.....

Catalogue

EACH TO EACH.

*If thou in years we know no more
Hast sometimes loved these little songs,
Take from me now what long before
To thee belonged and still belongs.*

*It came to me from very far
Over a spacious lake of dreams
To this garish world that only seems,
From the dim sweet hills that really are.*

*My heart is a reed on the windy shore
And the voice of me is dumb;
But thou knewest Eden mine of yore
And wilt arise and come.*

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Hymn to Night.

O Thou who holding nature to thy breast
Dost hush the broodings struggling in her soul,
While all around thy soothing shadows roll,
And the East murmurs softly to the West,
"The darkness and the silence are the best,"
Grant us the quiet calmness of thy sway, in our life-weary
rest.

The day-god swoons upon his purple bed,
Dyed in the life-blood of a thousand flowers;
Above him skip the never-ceasing hours
Racing towards doom, while o'er his sinking head
Thy noiseless presence leaps with noiseless tread,
Thy wide eyes peer across the western rim, over the sun-
set's red.

The Eternal Power musing o'er the abyss
Smiles in his thought, and kindled with delight
Unspeakable, the quivering vault of night
Bursts into fiery stars who, rapt in bliss,
With myriad eyes strain towards that smile and kiss
The darkness all about. O Night, thou art incarnate love-
liness.

Cui Fata Parent.

WHAT though a thousand sages
Thundered beneath the slough,
The Mongol of the Ages
Is the Mongol of the Now.
Not omenless the finger
That points across the sea
Where the angry storm-dogs linger
In the leash of destiny!

And knowing the requital—
It is written in The Book
How he digged and hid his title
For the toil he would not brook—
And knowing the requital,
Is it not worth thy breath
To rescue what is vital
From the quicksand that is death?

Older than all thy brothers,
Mightier born than they,
Thou, Teacher of the others,
And sleeping life away!
The Master comes ; no longer
Thy birthright disavow,
For Jacob still is stronger
And night is closing now.

From Behemoth no bellow
Moves from the sluggish mire,
(God save us from the yellow
When yellow turns to fire!)
The lamps of Death are burning,
The watchers are at hand,
And there is no returning
For whom the Fates demand.

Amoretta.

WHO is it that goes tripping by?
Her darling locks kiss the pure skin
Of her white neck, her little chin
Wistfully held on high.

Who is it that goes tripping by?

Mad heart be still!

Tremble your voices cooing doves,

O calm your voices wooing doves,

My love goes tripping by.

Who is that goes singing by?

Her thrilling voice, so low, so light,

Lulling the sleep of nestling night

Under the starry sky.

Who is it that goes singing by?

Mad heart be still!

Tremble your voices cooing doves,

O calm your voices wooing doves.

My love goes singing by.

Sonnet.

THERE is a dim unreachable desire
That mystifies the glory of the dawn,
And fills me with a sense of more withdrawn,
The more withdrawing as I the more aspire ;
That through the trembling echoes of the choir
Shivers in waves of wandering sympathies,
(And harmony no longer satisfies,
Because I caught a beauty that is higher.)

If on some morn I could have scanned the East
And watched the sun unveiled by doubt arise,
And felt the joy of liberty, and heard,
Uncloyed by sweeter sounds, the love-crazed bird,
If, crushed by loving, mystery had ceased,
Would I have wakened up in Paradise?

For a Portrait.

A background of dim trees whose dreaming shade
Leans wondering o'er her upturned face. The light
Daintily strays across her cheek and bright
Falls on her floating hair. As though the maid,
On summer's day, light-footed, hence had strayed
And some fair scene full dawned upon her sight.
Filled with a vague and half-unknown delight,
Smiling she gazes. Gently backwards laid
On the glad air, her head rests and eyes wide,
Locks in the wind, all naturalness and grace
She stands; a faint look half as she had sighed
In mild content dreams o'er her wistful face,
As Orpheus' form had met her eyes a space,
Or Pan's far pipings on the distance died.

They and Thou.

I call them friends, Dear Heart, whom circumstance
Led to my way;
Others I should have known
Choosing the other chance,
For friends may come and go in one brief day,
Creatures of circumstance :
No man may walk alone,
Others I might have known.

Dear Heart, my path along the shifting years
Must have been drawn to thine ;
For though preborn upon a glimmering star,
Immeasurably far,
I should have yearned across the infinite abyss,
And spanned it with a kiss
And grasped thy hand in mine.
Adown the pathway of the shifting years
I should have softly led thee to the music of the spheres.

Melancholy.

BOW thy proud head, O stubborn god of sea!
Stoop that huge brow and let those tangled locks
Tumble o'er thy low form and kiss the rocks,
Thy footstool, in a great humility.
Let melancholy breathe her soul on thee,
Calm thy fierce waves and fill thy surging breast
With drowsy languor, make thy billows bound
Dreamily slow, with a soft chiding sound
Like the far voice of weary agony,
Or sob along the shore in sweet unrest.

And thou O Moon! Make pale thy wistful light,
Let its wild beauty dream through heaven's space
Like a wan smile upon a maiden's face;
Pour thy beams on the dark, disclose the white
And trembling arms of all-surrounding night
Clasping the world; or as toward thy far throne
The solemn deep holds out its yearning lips,
So let the soul that of thy radiance sips
Spurn its abode, and with a mad delight
Flit toward thy melancholy sphere, alone.

Oh it is sweet to lie within a grove
Where hyacinth and lily on the air
Breathe heavy incense, and in mild despair
Loiter and dream beneath the shade, to rove
In mournful fancies of despairing love,
Madness and pain; to hear the drowsy drone
Of honey-laden bees with sleepy wings
Fanning the balmy breeze; while echo sings
With murmuring lips, around, beneath, above,
The deepness of the dreamy monotone.

Oh it is sweet to peer with wondering, wide,
Far eyes into the night, and feast the soul
On the swift worlds that through the darkness roll,
To lean o'er a clear lute from which there slide
Piercing delights, and hear from its slin side
The quivering music skip; ay, through all things
To see the wistful; and in the full, clear
Harmony of the deathless worlds, to hear
The yearning chord that in its deepness glides;
The passionate tone that through creation sings.

“If We Wait till the Close?”

SO, dust is the beauty of my flower,
And all because I kept it here
 Beyond its hour.
Praise Heaven! a fate is near
 To keep our eyes from vision of the end,
That we might see our sullen souls as drear,
 The higher love outgrown of Friend to Friend,
 Too barren for a tear.

Death's Kiss.

AH once your quiet eyes were calm and deep
And wistful with much dreaming! Long ago
Your solemn lips, so innocent of woe
And delicately parted, seemed to keep
Faint musings with themselves, and murmured low.
But that was long ago.

And I who saw and loved you from afar
Prayed a hushed prayer—the first I ever prayed—
That God might keep you safe, and unafraid
I looked up through the night at my one star,
Moving mysteriously and bright-arrayed;
And silently I prayed.

While you passed singing tenderly and low,
Wandering through life's meadows with slow tread.
Death laid his kiss on your beloved head.
But that was long ago.

The Philosophers.

WE watch you trafficking below,
Ye valley-children (who reveal,
Unmeant, the mysteries we feel);
Coming ye prayed of us to show
The Potter's everlasting wheel;
Such things as we must yet conceal
With patience bide; we know, we know.

Silence.

SWEET Music revels in her own delight
And sighs, "O slavish Silence—short-lived death
Of airy splendors—how my whispered breath
Hath slain thee wholly, as the dawn the night!"

Even with the words the sound of them has passed:
Quietness dims hushed voices till they cease,
Soothing their aching beauty into peace.
Silence remains, inexorable, vast.

No Longer I Exalted.

NO longer I exalted to self-believed supremacy—
A supremacy self-believed in moments of musical
rapture,
But I a mere nauseating 'monad,
Having had just enough acquaintance with men's ways to
appoint myself a warning to you.
Now consider these words which shall be everlasting truth:
There is but one unpardonable sin—
The permitting, the fostering of life without a passionate
heart;
Herein are all insincerities, lies, coldnesses (grosser than
foully-directed and uncurbed lustings),
Herein is fickleness.
He is foredamned by all religions and by the man of no
religion—
That is he who says,
In this thing that I do I take no joy,
Yet is there nothing else in which I could take more joy.
Pity no more the Shelleys confident of some day being
understood,
Nor the vigorous, chained Columbuses,
Nor any man who can be sure of his own greatness, and
find more potent applause in rocks, waterfalls, the
melody of thrushes.
Pity only the ineffectual man, the man mediocre and inert,
He who is unquestionably capable of yawning in the mo-
ments which are his utmost strain of passion,
He who is not put into any prison, but stagnates more
contemptibly than those who throng prisons,
(No one ever undertook to imprison a dying skunk);
Therefore come and listen, and then go away and act
quickly,
Otherwise you will think several times too much, you will
become effete, indifferent, musty,
You will become theoretical.

I have endeavored to express a mood and have expressed it.

Psyche.

CEASELESS I rush on my round
Of ceaseless motion, and hurled
By the will in myself and the sound
Of the voice, which speedily whirled
My being onward, with glee
I run on my circle and spring
To that Power whose throne is the world,
Who rules, moves and is everything;
Of which I am but as a spark
Of the flame, which illumines the dark
And limitless waste of the world.

I am but a thought from his brain,
A drop of the soul in his breast;
Through suffering and anguish and pain
I rush at my being's behest
And pass to new forms again ;
For such is the will in my breast.
And when my circle is done,
Drawn by the omnipotent power
Of that which hath made me, I run
As a moth to the candle. That hour
I am that which ruleth my soul,
Myself and my Maker are one,
I am lost in the depths of his power.

Amalfi.

WHEN we shall come where years ago
Eden I built for thee,
There where hot noons with humming low
Beguile the sleeping sea,
All the sweet dreams thy soul shall know
That seemed too sweet to be.

There we shall lie in the warm sand
Together lost in dreams,
By orange-laden breezes fanned
And perfume from cool streams,
And shall not care while hand in hand
What is and what but seems.

That haze of childhood-born Romance
Shall fetter us no more,
And every load of circumstance
Our lives aforetime bore
Shall melt within that silver trance
Beside that silver shore.

Thy soul from mine among the spheres
No longer far shall be,
Nor sightless fears nor useless tears
Shall part thy love from me,
When we come where in distant years
Eden I built for thee.

Urania.

THE mistress of the soul adown the years,
Up from the shadowy ages, on her dance;
Delightful, trips. Her ever-changing glance
Now moves the world to joy and now to tears.
Life's beauty in her utterance appears
And still she sings intense, the truth that burns behind our
hopes and fears.

Adown the years she trips. A dazzling throng
Immortal, follow her, the sacred nine
Drunk with life's beauty as with ruddy wine
Purpling the mouth. Music and art and song
With mad delight lead the mad dance along.
They move like satyrs in a bacchanal, passionate, fierce
and strong.

Yet not the Ogygian god with fiery breath
Inflames their blood. Inspired by the light
That blazes from pure beauty and the might
Of winged thought, triumphant over death,
They speed along, with eager panting breath
To reach the Infinite Beauty, whose far light dazzles the
world beneath.

And Harmony was there, and Genius too
Flashed by, with fleet foot spurning the light cloud
On which he trod. And ever half-aloud,
Faint musings from his depthless rapture flew,
Quivering the air. And Orpheus who grew
From childhood up with deep-eyed reverie, whom deep-
eyed reverie slow.

And with the rest trip on Ideals and Graces,
Shadows and Dreams, and Fancy only bound
By her own will. With a dim murmuring sound
Of god-like music, all with eager faces
Dash, through those short and yet life-teeming spaces
Which we call centuries, as life would flee the dark death
that him chases.

Then was the world one dream of beauty. Then
Free-willed Imagination did create
Marvellous fancies, which to contemplate
Are wistful pleasure. In those ages when
Fair thoughts, like stars, shone in the minds of men,
And god-like forms with god-like power wrought, in hill
and field and glen.

The Cry From Galway.

(And this reply from a Fifth Avenue kitchen)

THE voice of my Fathers in the lone wild wail
Of the west-borne wind comes to me over-sea,
With a dream of consolation for the promises that fail
And a vision for the broken of the things that cannot be.

Lo! in my hearth where the ashes lie dead,
(And the embers of Ambition lie as gray and as cold)
Is a symbol of the new life whence the dream-built hopes
have fled,
And the dim far beck of my fathers to the old.

I have rotted my soul with the sluggishness of knowing,
I have jarred against the wall where no more can be
known,
And the rustle of the moor-sand is the tread of my going
To the waters of loud Galway, to the green hills of
Tyrone.

The yearning of my Fathers leaps up in my soul
For the subtle tests of motive in an age of barren act;
For the self-obscuring vision of the heaven of the whole,
And the mystic distant waters veiling gross ephemeral
fact.

The echo in my being of the vague primordial cry
Is a silent sick aversion to the growing of the New;
And the essence of my nature rises in me to reply:
I am coming, O my Fathers, I am coming back to you!

Mirror.

O sing glad soul, up from the sod
To heaven's bosom, not o'er-awed ;
The dust aspiring from the dust,
Till God look down and look on God.

Autumn Leaves in June.

AT dawn I walked the hilly pass ;
The warbler's wavering tune
Joined with the fragrance of the grass
To tell me it was June.

Roused from the stronghold of his nest
Fluttered the busy wren ;
I felt a bound within my breast
And life was good again.

The echoes of a happier day
Once more within me woke—
Alas ! I saw beside the way
A branch of withered oak.

It was the leprous hand of death
Laid on the throne of Heaven—
It was the vapor of his breath
Damning the once-forgiven.

Ah ! In the beauty of the morn,
I know not anything
So bleak, so hopeless, so forlorn
As Autumn leaves in Spring.

And when my winter comes, I pray
To disappear too soon
For men to find *me* by the way—
An Autumn leaf in June.

Silent Heart.

THE fading music is fled,
The shadows creep on the wall,
The mourners wail, *She is dead,*
And singing circle the pall.
But I only sit far apart
Silent, with silent heart
And low-bowed head.

There comes a far voice from the skies
Beyond where the shadows are fled.
The watchers are closing her eyes,
The mourners wail, *She is dead.*
But I lean to the voice from afar
And read in each quivering star,
Eternity never dies.

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